

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *2000 Court Statistics Report* is now published electronically as part of the Administrative Office of the Courts' (AOC) effort to modernize the dissemination of state court workload data and make court information more accessible and easier to review. It contains 10-year statewide trend data as well as fiscal year 1998–99 data for individual counties. (The limited-edition printed version of this report contains primarily statewide data.)

The *Court Statistics Report* and the *Judicial Council Annual Report* are available at www.courtinfo.ca.gov. Printed copies of these reports are available from the Publications Hotline at 800-900-5980.

The *Court Statistics Report* is prepared by the AOC pursuant to the provisions of article VI, section 6 of the California Constitution, which requires the Judicial Council to survey the condition of business in the state courts and to report and make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

Trial Court Unification

On June 2, 1998, California voters approved Proposition 220, a constitutional amendment that permitted the judges in each county to decide whether to merge their superior and municipal courts into a single unified superior court. As of the date of this report, unification was in effect in 55 of the state's 58 counties. All data in this report reflect court unification. The "Trial Courts" section replaces the separate superior and municipal court sections in past reports.

Principal Findings

Court filing and disposition data represent key measures of court workload, but other factors also must be considered. For example, the filing of a complex case may result in numerous court appearances and actions, while a simple case may be resolved in a single appearance of less than one hour. Yet both types of cases are considered single filings and thus appear equal in terms of their impacts on the court. Examples of complex cases include felonies, personal injuries, and family relations matters, such as custody and juvenile dependency.

Principal findings in this report include the following:

SUPREME COURT

- Total dispositions reached 8,608 in fiscal year 1998–99, 5 percent more than in the previous fiscal year and 21 percent more than the average for the previous five years. For every 100 filings in 1998–99, the court disposed of 104 cases. This is the first year since 1994–95 in which dispositions exceeded filings in the Supreme Court.
- Total filings reached 8,310 in 1998–99, 4 percent less than the year before and 15 percent more than the average for the previous five years.
- The court issued 88 written opinions in 1998–99, slightly below its five-year average of 95.4 opinions per fiscal year.
- Dispositions of petitions for review fell 2 percent, from 5,611 in 1997–98 to 5,487 in 1998–99.
- Filings of original proceedings rose 6 percent, to 2,688. Original proceedings are one of the fastest-growing areas of work for the Supreme Court, having increased by more than 70 percent over the last five years.
- Dispositions of automatic appeals (death penalty cases) fell to 9 in fiscal year 1998–99 compared with the court’s five-year average of 14 per year. (An average opinion in an automatic appeal analyzes over three times more issues than an average opinion in all other case categories.) Dispositions of habeas corpus petitions related to automatic appeals totaled 36, exceeding the five-year average of 31 petitions per year.

COURTS OF APPEAL

- Filings of records of appeal were 16,186 in 1998–99, compared with 15,931 in 1997–98, an increase of 2 percent. While criminal filings declined by almost 5 percent, juvenile filings rose by 16 percent and civil filings rose by 5 percent.
- Filings of original proceedings fell 2 percent, from 9,116 in 1997–98 to 8,915 in 1998–99. This decline is due to a 10 percent decrease in the filings of civil original proceedings. Both juvenile original proceedings and criminal original proceedings rose during the same period, criminal by 3 percent and juvenile by 9 percent.
- For the first time in a decade, dispositions by written opinion fell in 1998–99, declining 4 percent to 13,701 from 14,238 in 1997–98. Of these, the number of written opinions fell in both civil and criminal cases while rising slightly in juvenile cases. Dispositions by written opinion declined 4 percent in civil cases and 7 percent in criminal but rose by 8 percent in juvenile cases.

TRIAL COURTS

- More than 8.6 million cases were filed in trial courts in 1998–99, up less than 0.1 percent over the previous year and down 1.3 percent in the past five years.¹
- Total criminal filings increased 2 percent, from 6,744,264 in 1997–98 to 6,861,200 in 1998–99.
- Personal injury, property damage, and wrongful death filings rose 2 percent to 69,666.²
- Combined domestic-related filings (family law, juvenile dependency, and other civil petitions) declined 4 percent from 1997–98 levels, after climbing to a high of 645,433 filings in 1995–96.³ Despite the decline in recent years, filings in this category remain 34 percent above their level a decade ago.
- Driving under the influence, reckless driving causing injury, and hit-and-run misdemeanor filings rose 3.5 percent over last year, from 191,034 to 197,727. However, filings in this category have declined 42 percent during the last decade.
- Felony jury trials increased by 8 percent, from 5,412 in 1997–98 to 5,847 in 1998–99. Jury trials accounted for 2.8 percent of felony dispositions in 1998–99.
- Misdemeanor jury trials increased 17 percent, from 5,018 in 1997–98 to 5,863 in 1998–99.
- Civil jury trials declined 1 percent, from 4,357 in 1997–98 to 4,315 in 1998–99.⁴
- Case-processing times for civil cases improved. Fifty-nine percent of general civil cases in 1998–99 were disposed of within one year of filing, an improvement over fiscal year 1994–95, when only 49 percent were disposed of within that time frame. Similarly, 88 percent of general civil cases in 1998–99 were disposed of within two years of filing, compared with only 77 percent in 1994–95. Case-processing time also improved for limited-jurisdiction civil cases, unlawful detainer cases, and small claims cases.

JUDICIAL ASSIGNMENTS

- In 1998–99, total judicial assistance received from retired judges, Court of Appeal justices, and trial court judges declined 13 percent, from 29,010 days the previous fiscal year to 25,211 days.
- Of the judicial assistance provided, 97 percent came from retired judges, 3 percent from trial court judges, and less than 1 percent from Court of Appeal justices.

¹ 8,626,287 in 1998–99, 8,620,947 in 1997–98.

² Trial Courts Table 4: Motor vehicle PI/PD/WD + Other PI/PD/WD.

³ Trial Courts Table 4 columns F and H and Table 12 column D, 1998–99: 543,067; 1997–98: 563,509; 1995–96: 645,433; 1989–90: 404,689.

⁴ Trial Courts Table 3: Total jury trials – felony jury trials – misdemeanor jury trials.